



In 1979 an Islamic Revolution overthrew the Shah Reza Pahlavi royal dynasty. The revolutionaries adopted a theocratic constitution and founded the Islamic Republic of Iran. Under its constitution, the Supreme Religious Leader (Ayatollah) assumes the highest religious and political authority. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned from exile in Iraq. He exercised Supreme Rule until his death in 1989. He was succeeded by Ayatollah Ali Khomeini.

Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa in 1979 ordering that religious minorities, including Jews and Christians, be treated with tolerance. But in practice the treatment of religious and ethnic minorities worsened. The Ayatollah's fatwa did not protect the Baha'i, who have been persecuted since their founding in the 1850s. This religious minority accepts other religions and considers their founder, Bhá'u'lláh, a messenger of God. The Shi'ite Muslim Iranian government regards the Baha'i as apostates and treats them as a heretical cult. Between 1978 and 1998 more than 200 Baha'i were killed or disappeared. Many others are still wrongfully imprisoned. The Baha'i are subject to widespread and systematic discrimination and persecution.

The Iranian government targets other minority groups as well. Recent facts evidence the persecution of the ethnic Arab minority in Iran (read more). Furthermore, Sunni Muslims – who are predominantly Kurds but also Arabs – as well as Jews and Christians, face discrimination, arbitrary imprisonment, harassment and intimidation. Since the election of president Ahmadinejad in 2005 the religious and ethnic discrimination has increased.

Political opponents of the Iranian regime are also repressed. In 2009 president Ahmadinejad was re-elected in a highly contested vote. Announcement of the results caused violent demonstrations. Ayatollah Khomeini confirmed the re-election of president Ahmadinejad over the more moderate candidate, Mir-Hossein Moussavi. The Iranian government repressed the protests by shooting demonstrators, arbitrary executions, mass trials and torture. The demonstrations led to the creation of the Green Movement, which is still suppressed by the Iranian government.

Besides internal political, religious and ethnic conflicts, international tensions are increasing as well. Since the election of president Ahmadinejad in 2005 the Iranian government has led an anti-Semitic campaign against Israel that is reminiscent of the propaganda of Nazi Germany. Dr. Gregory Stanton, the president of Genocide Watch and President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, has denounced Iranian threats to "wipe Israel off the face of the map" as incitement to genocide (read letter to president Bush). There is increasing evidence that Iran's nuclear program is intended to develop nuclear weapons, and that its missile program is intended to give it a first strike capacity to attack Israel. These developments have recently led to speculation that as pre-emptive self-defence, Israel will attack Iranian nuclear facilities. Iran accuses Israel of assassinating its nuclear scientists, while Israel believes that current attacks on its diplomatic personnel in foreign countries are reprisals directed by the Iranian government. Iran supports anti-Israel terrorist groups such as the Hezbollah.

Iran is at level 5 of Genocide Watch's 8 stages of genocide: Polarization. Genocide Watch monitors the situation in Iran on the basis of the following early warning signs:

- At the internal level, the widespread discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities, in particular the Baha'i, is alarming. The government is authoritarian, and is controlled by a religious elite with an exclusionary ideology.
- At the external level, the nuclear program of Iran threatens international peace and security, especially in combination with Iran's anti-Semitic campaign against Israel.